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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5971
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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4213
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1299
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4155
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF A
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

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11. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following a local media report on the government's efforts to implement its plan on national parks, Pol/Econ local staff member met with two environmental activists to discuss the issue. Both contacts confirmed the national parks to be the most effective form of nature protection for Turkmenistan, welcomed the government's efforts towards the implementation of the plan, and hoped that it will be done in accordance with a pending draft law. END SUMMARY.

13. (U) According to the Ministry of Nature Protection, there are eight strictly protected nature preserves ("zapovedniks") and thirteen nature preserves with limited public access ("zakazniks"). Generally, locals that live near zakazniks can get permission to continue using the land for hunting or livestock grazing. However, other people are banned from the area. The eight zapovedniks are Amudarya, Badhyz, Kaplankyr, Kopetdag, Koytendag, Repetek, Sunt-Hosardag, and Hazarskiy. The Government of Turkmenistan ratified the UN Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and is preparing documents for Badhyz to receive the status of an international natural heritage site. This status would mean that Turkmenistan would receive money for the upkeep of Badhyz, but would also have to adhere to UN requirements and allow monitoring for compliance.

14. (U) The organization and operation of zapovedniks and zakazniks is regulated by the law "On Nature Protection" (1991) and the law "On Specially Protected State Natural Territories" (1992), as well as

additional regulations. The laws and regulations provide a legal basis for preserving nature sites which have special ecological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational value. The Ministry of Nature Protection is in charge of zapovedniks. Zakazniks are overseen by the Ministry of Nature Protection in conjunction with local governments.

15. (U) Recently, local media reported on a government plan to create national parks, commenting that this is "the most effective method of managing Turkmenistan's nature preserves." According to the report, the existing zapovedniks with their strict regime of protection will serve as the center of future national parks. What are now the zakazniks will be incorporated, and in addition there will be land open to the public for recreation and ecological tourism that will serve as a buffer zone for the strictly protected areas. All of these areas with their different levels of protection will constitute a national park.

16. (SBU) Pol/Econ local staff member met with two local environmental activists to talk about the government's plan for the national parks. Tatyana Rotaru, a specialist of the Kopetdag nature preserve, said that the Ministry of Nature Protection has already prepared a decree for establishing Archabil national park, which will include the Central Kopetdag zapovednik on the border with Iran, the recreational zone Geokdere, which is 30 kilometers to the west from Ashgabat, as well as late President Niyazov's Health Walk and the cable car in Berzengi, on the outskirts

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of Ashgabat. Rotaru said that while the Kopetdag zapovednik will continue to be a strictly protected area, the remaining territory of the Archabil national park will be open for tourism and recreation.

17. (SBU) However, the government has yet to adopt a law what will regulate national parks. Rotaru noted that such a law should eliminate current interagency and territorial disputes between local and national governments. One element of the law would be to establish a national park service that would take over the administration of the national parks from the local or national government bodies. Rotaru said that the German Ministry of Nature Protection was assisting Turkmenistan's Ministry of Nature Protection in drafting the law on national parks.

18. (SBU) Timur Berkeliyev, an environmental specialist and active member of a local NGO, said that strictly protected nature preserves proved not to be the most effective form of nature protection. He said that some controlled human activity was needed to keep nature balanced. As an example, he referred to the decrease of the underground water in wells in the Karakum desert due to the extensive growth of haloxylon, a desert tree, which the local population used to cut for firewood. They stopped chopping down the trees after the Turkmen villages began being supplied with natural gas. He also said that denying access to sheep for grazing in the desert resulted in extensive growth of "black moss," an aggressive plant which threatens endemic desert plants. Berkeliyev took part in the development of the Ministry of Nature Protection's list of prospective territories for creating national parks, and welcomed the efforts of the government in drafting the required legislation for management of the national parks.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Local environmental organizations welcome the efforts of the government towards the implementation of its plan on national parks. They

hope that the opening of some parts of the nature preserves to the public as national parks and creating a clearer law will bring transparency in nature protection matters. They also hope that the new system would stop illegal use of nature preserve resources by corrupt officials. However, although better legislation might be a step towards better protection of nature, enforcement of the rules is the key. END COMMENT.

ECKSTROM